



## Ecuador

### International Religious Freedom Report 2005

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 109,483 square miles, and the 2001 census estimated its population to be 12.2 million. The General Registry of Religious Entities has registered 1,802 religious groups, churches, societies, Christian fraternities, and foundations.

Together with the armed forces and the Government, the Roman Catholic Church is widely viewed as one of the three pillars of society. The overwhelming majority of the population is at least nominally Catholic. Some groups, particularly indigenous people who live in the mountains, follow a form of Catholicism that combines indigenous beliefs with orthodox Catholic doctrine. Saints often are venerated in ways similar to indigenous deities.

The combination of poverty, neglect, and syncretistic practices in urban and rural areas created conditions that were conducive to the spread of Protestant missionary and Pentecostal evangelical activity. Southern Baptists, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, and Pentecostals have successfully found converts in different regions, particularly among indigenous people in the Sierra provinces of Chimborazo and Pichincha, among persons who practice syncretic religions, and in groups that are marginalized by society. Other popular evangelical groups include the Assembly of God in urban areas and the Church of the Word of God, which is growing rapidly in indigenous areas.

Hundreds of evangelical churches exist, and many of them are not connected with a particular denomination. Some multid denominational Christian groups, such as the Gospel Missionary Union, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, and Hoy Cristo Jesus Bendice, have been active for many years.

Several groups registered with the Government in very small numbers: Anglicans, Baha'is, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and the Unification Church. Other groups present in small numbers are Muslims, Jews, and adherents of Eastern Orthodox religions. There are also followers of Inti, the traditional Inca sun god, and some atheists.

Organized foreign missionary groups working in the country include Southern Baptists, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Pentecostals. Other missionaries are nondenominational or affiliated with independent churches.

#### Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

##### Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution grants all citizens and foreigners the right to practice the faith of their choice freely, in public or in private; the only limits are "those proscribed by law to protect and respect the diversity, plurality, security, and rights of others." The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion.

The Government does not require religious groups to be licensed or registered unless they engage in commercial activity. Religious organizations that do not engage in such activity may still choose to register to obtain a legal identity, which is useful when entering into contracts. Any religious organization wishing to register with the Government must possess a charter and be in nonprofit status, include all names used by the group (to ensure that names of previously registered groups are not used without their permission), and provide signatures of at least 35 members. In addition, groups must file a petition with the Ministry of Government, using a licensed attorney, and pay a \$54 registration fee.

At the political level, the Government retains strong ties to the Vatican; the Papal Nuncio is the customary dean of the diplomatic corps.

The Government permits missionary activity and public religious expression by all religious groups.

The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools; private schools have complete liberty to provide religious instruction, as do parents in the home. There are no restrictions on publishing religious materials in any language.

#### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

#### Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

#### Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

#### Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

#### Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government and civil society as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

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